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17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS) The role of parents in the occupational choices of rural youth is discussed. Conclusions are based on information gathered from nine previous studies and from a limited survey of adult education programs. Consideration is given to parental influences in vocational choice of rural inhabitants, to programs to improve parental roles in occupational choice of rural youth, and to implications for future action.

Educational and occupational counseling of rural parents is less effective than that of urban parents; there are few adult education programs to improve this function. Helpful programs include home visits of a 4-H Club agent with interested farm families to discuss occupational plans, joint meetings of parents and youth in rural communities to provide information on college opportunities, a parents' night in 4-H Clubs to present career information, and a television series to provide career information for parents of rural youth. Concern for the special career problems of rural youth, as reflected in action programs, is limited. Socioeconomic status of the family is related positively to levels of aspiration; therefore, rural parents' aspirations for their children are low. Mothers' educational and occupational aspirations for their children are higher than are fathers'.

Recommendations are made for adult education programs to improve the occupational and educational counseling functions of rural parents. Rural and professional leaders should be made aware of the disadvantaged situation of rural youth in competition for jobs before successful programs can be implemented. Once the need is realized, programs can be designed to help rural parents appreciate the value of education and the importance of their counseling role. Maximum effectiveness depends on the stimulation of community as well as of individual parental response.

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ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND PARENTS' ROLES IN CAREER PLANS OF RURAL YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the significant role of one reference group -- parents -- in the occupational choices of rural youth. Evidence would suggest that:

1. rural parents generally function less effectively in educational and occupational counseling than do their urban counterparts;

2. rural parents tend to have lower educational and occupational aspirations for their children;

3. socioeconomic status of the family is positively related to aspiration levels;

4. mothers tend to have higher educational and occupational aspirations for their children than do fathers;

5. parents of boys planning to farm generally have relatively lower aspirational levels for their sons in terms of both education and occupation;

6. only to a limited degree is there evidence of real concern, as reflected in action, for the special career problems of rural youth; and

7. very few adult educational programs have been implemented to assist rural parents in functioning more effectively in the counseling role. A few examples discovered through direct enquiry of nineteen different organizations and individuals are cited in detail.

In the design of adult education programs for rural parents to help them function more effectively in educational and occupational counseling, the following seem pertinent:

I A necessary first step will be to create in both farm-rural and professional leadership an awareness of and appreciation for the disadvantaged situation of rural youth today in competition for occupational opportunities.

II Specific adult education programs should be designed to help rural parents (1) appreciate the value of education in our modern society, (2) appreciate the importance of their role as educational and vocational counselor for their children, and (3) function more effectively in their counseling role.

III Parents have parental responsibilities not only to their individual children but in the community as well. Adult education programs for parents should be designed to stimulate community as well as individual parental response.

INTRODUCTION

Disturbing but consistent evidence indicates that rural young people today are seriously disadvantaged as they move into competition with their urban counterparts for adult occupations. These rural-urban educational and occupational differentials seem not to be related to innate differences in intellectual ability or other potential. Rather, the differences in aspirations and achievement between rural and urban youth reflect the nature of experiences the two groups have had, the attitudes they have developed about themselves, the values they have learned to place on education and alternate work roles, and the kinds of competencies they have had an opportunity to develop. 1/

These characteristics are the result of the total complex of interactions of each individual in his family, school and community roles. As occupational decisions are made, the variety, nature, and intensity of his experiences with other persons relevant to this choice-making process come sharply into play. 2/ Such reference groups influence the individual's ideas about himself, his values, people, things, job preferences, aspirations. The importance of reference groups and significant individuals as influences in occupational choices is well recognized. 3/

In this paper the focus will be on the significance of only one reference group -- parents. Consideration will be given to evidence of parental influences in vocational choice, particularly in rural society; current programs designed to improve the parents function in the occupational choices of rural youth; and implications and considerations for action.

THE PARENTS' ROLE

The influence of parents in development of youth's occupational plans is well documented. In several studies, parents have been most frequently cited by youth as being "helpful" or having "great influence" on occupational plans. 4/ Beyond this, teachers, friends, and vocational counselors are of major influence, in that general order. 5/ There is a consistency, however, in evidence that parents play the leading role in the formulation of educational and occupational aspirations. 6/

RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES

Evidence suggests, however, that rural parents may generally function less effectively in this educational and occupational counseling role than do their urban counterparts. In Iowa, urban boys more frequently reported that their parents discussed occupational plans with them than did farm, rural nonfarm, or small town boys. Such parental discussions regarding occupational plans were reported least frequently by farm boys who did not intend to farm. 7/

Differences in educational aspirations of rural and urban youth appears also to reflect parental interest. In Iowa 8/ and elsewhere, 9/ farm boys less frequently indicated parental encouragement for college attendance than did rural nonfarm and small town boys. Urban boys most frequently report parental encouragement to attend college. Mothers in each of the three

residence groups were more often cited as providing definite encouragement for college attendance than were fathers.

PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS

Adolescents generally look to their parents and try to fulfill their parents' desires. Some would suggest that rural youth, because of closer family ties, may reply on parents even more than do city youth. 10/ Thus, parental aspirations may be especially influential in the occupational choices of rural youth.

Educational plans of rural youth are in fact highly related to the aspirations of their parents for them. Rural youth who have college plans or aspirations for higher prestige nonfarm occupations generally report strong parental encouragement to enter college or aspirations for them to enter higher prestige nonfarm occupations. 11/

FAMILY STATUS

The general social status level of the family also influences educational and occupational aspiration levels. Many studies indicate that youth from families of higher status more frequently aspire to higher prestige occupations or have college plans.

A positive relationship between family socioeconomic level and educational aspirations has been reported within subsamples of youth having low, middle, or high measured intelligence. 12/ Youth in lower status families often begin their occupational experiences at earlier ages and thus are confronted with occupational choices at an earlier point in their development. 13/ This fact, coupled with the usually less constructive counseling of lower socioeconomic status parents and lack of job opportunities and understanding of alternatives, represents a complicating combination for these youth.

PLANS TO FARM

Parents strongly influence the occupational plans of farm boys. Parents of boys planning to farm generally have relatively low aspiration levels in either education or nonfarm occupations for their sons. On the other hand, plans not to farm are usually related to parental encouragement to attend college or seek higher prestige nonfarm occupations. Again, nonfarm plans are related more frequently to higher educational and occupational aspirations held by mothers than fathers. 14/

For boys planning to farm, fathers had the greatest influence in their career choice. Teachers, mothers, and others were less important. Boys planning nonfarm careers, however, reported that mothers, teachers, or vocational counselors were the most important influence. 15/

CURRENT PROGRAMS

To provide a perspective of the extent and nature of current adult education programs designed to help rural parents function more effectively in

educational and occupational counseling, a comprehensive review of varied literature sources was undertaken. In addition, enquiries were sent to 19 different organizations and individuals. Included were farm organizations; educational, business, industrial, religious, and rural-oriented interest groups; and government agencies. While such efforts cannot be assumed to be completely exhaustive, the net result would suggest a paucity of such adult educational efforts.

The most encouraging aspects of this review and correspondence were: (1) the general awareness of the dimensions and nature of the critical occupational decisions and situations confronting American youth; (2) the consistent concern that constructive programs be designed and implemented; (3) a receptivity for ideas and a willingness to provide assistance as possible; and (4) evidence of constructive action programs now underway from a variety of sources and employing a host of techniques to provide assistance to youth in their occupational choices.

On the disturbing side, there was little recognition of the special occupational problems of rural youth or awareness of the parents' role in educational and occupational plans of youth. The little evidence accumulated would suggest a relatively greater awareness of the former situation than the latter.

On the constructive side, a few examples of creative and imaginative parent education programs in career counseling were discovered. While not descriptive of the general situation, they suggest possible courses of action and are cited briefly for that purpose:

. In Michigan, one County 4-H Club Agent has established an annual pattern of home visits with interested farm families to discuss individual and occupational plans. Parents, as well as youth, are involved in these family conferences. Individual personal follow-up, especially for youth planning to enter college, also is carried out.

. In several counties or rural communities, joint meetings of parents and youth have been conducted to provide information on college opportunities. Questions of the importance and benefits of higher education, entrance requirements, costs, scholarship and loan possibilities, and like concerns can be answered specifically. Such sessions have been sponsored individually or jointly by schools, farm organizations, and Extension.

. Individual local 4-H Clubs in an Iowa county had a special Parents Night when Extension Agents presented up-to-date career information of concern to rural youth. A particular emphasis of the series was to make parents aware of the realities of the situation confronting their sons and daughters and to provide information useful to them in decisions for action.

. In many situations, parents have been included in Career Day sessions, career tours, and career discussion programs designed for youth. Such programs have been conducted by farm organizations, schools, Extension personnel, agencies and others.

. Programs aimed at special groups, such as migrant families, often include a special appeal aimed at parental responsibility for their children's future. Church organizations and agencies have been especially conscious of such special needs.

. Most respondents to the mail enquiry included copies of materials designed for youth and suggested that such information would be of interest and useful to parents as well. The extent to which such materials have been used effectively in this way is not known.

. Some schools have included parents in the career counseling and guidance programs conducted with students. By personal involvement, parents have become better informed and therefore better able to function as counselors.

. Situational statements have been developed in visual form for use with adult audiences. As a public affairs education feature, a slidetape presentation prepared by an Agricultural Economics Extension Specialist has served as a resource for group discussions throughout Michigan.

. A television series in the St. Louis area was designed for adults to provide information on career opportunities and considerations for youth. Discussion groups, coupled with an opportunity to telephone questions to the studio for answer, represented an unusual technique. While not directed to rural parents, it suggests an interesting approach.

THE PROBLEM IN PROFILE

The foregoing suggests that:

1. Rural parents generally function less effectively in educational and occupational counseling than do their urban counterparts.

2. Rural parents typically have lower educational and occupational aspirations for their children.

3. Socioeconomic status of the family is positively related to aspiration levels.

4. Mothers usually have higher educational and occupational aspirations for their children than do fathers.

5. Parents of boys planning to farm generally have relatively lower educational and occupational aspiration levels for their sons.

6. Only to a limited degree is there evidence of a real concern, as reflected in action, for the special career problems of rural youth.

7. Very few adult educational programs have been implemented to assist rural parents in functioning more effectively in the counseling role.

IMPLICATIONS

With the recognition that parents are a major -- probably the major -- reference group in the occupational choices of youth and the convincing evidence that rural parents tend to function relatively ineffectively in their educational-occupational counseling role in the realities of today's situation, the appropriateness of adult education programs designed to improve this effectiveness is apparent. In the design of such programs, the following observations seem pertinent.

A necessary first step will be to create in both farm-rural and professional leadership an awareness of an appreciation for the disadvantaged situation of rural youth today in competition for occupational opportunities. Major features of this situation include the following points as summarized by Burchinal.16/

1. The majority of rural youth must, by preference or necessity, move to urban areas in pursuit of adult careers . . . .

2. Wide disparity frequently exists between occupational preferences or aspiration levels and available occupational opportunities . . . .

3. Rural youth apparently are at a disadvantage when entering an urban labor market and competing with urban youth for available occupations . . . .

4. Rural farm youth are frequently at a greater disadvantage than rural nonfarm youth upon entering the urban labor market . . . .

5. Plans to farm have a strong negative influence on a boy's plans to attend college, even though modern farming requires all the education, training, and experience a boy can obtain . . . .

6. Occupational choices are based upon tentative occupational choices and arrived at by occupational role taking. This, in turn, is related to the individual's social and psychological development. These highly personal choices are made in context of an individual's experiences and resources; his knowledge of occupational alternatives, training requirements, and financial and nonmonetary rewards; and such important variables as his preferences or value systems and personality characteristics.

   The influence of family members, school personnel, other adults, and friends also contribute to the development of the occupational role-taking process . . . .

7. Rural youth from lower socioeconomic status families face special problems in occupational decision making. The probabilities of finishing high school, going to college, or entering above-average-paying occupations are considerably less for children from lower social status families. Differences are not based on economic factors alone ....

> Lower social status parents encourage their children less to develop favorable attitudes toward high school or higher educational and occupational aspirations . . . .

The entire rural community -- elected officials, school administrators, farm and rural organizational leadership, agency representatives, parents -- must recognize the unpleasant realities of this situation and be motivated to action. Such a readiness to act will necessarily precede any parent education program, which must be an integral part of a coordinated plan.

Adult education is necessary to help rural parents appreciate the value of an education in our modern society and to realize the importance of their role as educational and vocational counselors for their children. 17/

In designing such programs, specific and careful attention must be given to the characteristics indicated in the evidence of rural parent functioning detailed earlier. Thus, special approaches will recognize different socio-economic groups, farm and rural nonfarm families, fathers and mothers, current community programs, and the like. The degree of geographic isolation from urban influence also will have pertinence.

The complexity of the educational task involved is related to the fact that the parent's influence on occupational choice through counsel and guidance is determined by what the parent regards as important in life -- in short, his values. Since, to a large extent, the values which people hold may be unconscious, they are extremely difficult to deal with. 18/

Nonetheless, aggressive and imaginative adult educational programs must be implemented to improve the effectiveness of rural parents in their educational guidance roles. Special projects now underway in Michigan and perhaps elsewhere, designed to explore the changing of aspirations of young people through parent education, may provide helpful guidance is such programing.

Finally, parents have responsibilities not only to their individual children but in the community as well. Many of the steps necessary to improvement of the occupational situation of rural youth will require adjusted and increased expenditures of funds for strengthened school curricula, vocational training courses, testing and counseling programs, expanded community programs like 4-H, information programs of employment services, and the like. To make available the necessary resources, an informed and responsive public will be necessary. Parents as a group with particularly keen and vested concerns, can be a crucial ingredient in securing such support.

Thus, adult education programs for parents should be designed to stimulate community as well as individual parental response.

CONCLUSIONS

The answers to questions of improving the occupational decision-making processes of rural youth are interrelated and complex. No one course of action in itself will suffice. Any program developed for a particular rural

community should be carefully tailored to meet the needs of that particular situation.

In any such effort, however, the prominent role of rural parents in the occupational decisions of youth should be recognized. Since rural parents appear to function relatively ineffectively in this role, specific adult education programs aimed at improvement of this function seem essential.

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